

Duffield Fiber Optic Project Lighting Event (August 2, 2005)

Gate City, Virginia

I am pleased to join this morning with officials from Scott County and the Scott County Telephone Cooperative to participate in a truly worthy celebration. Today, we formally light the new Duffield Fiber Optic Network, a project which will enable the provision of broadband services, including affordable high-speed Internet access, digital television and telephone services, to households and businesses in the old Town of Duffield, Thomas Village and the Duffield Industrial Park. In addition, a new public Internet access site connected to the fiber optic network has been established in the community.

Approximately ten years ago, I encouraged local governments throughout the Ninth District to find a means of deploying broadband networks so that affordable high-speed Internet access would be available to businesses and residents throughout our region. My goal in making this recommendation was to set our region apart in comparison to other rural areas of the nation, to make us more attractive than the typical rural region to industries looking to expand their operations into new locations, and to create technology-based jobs for Southwest Virginians.

Today, I am pleased to note that many of the communities in our region are making great strides in the deployment of broadband networks, and the success which we celebrate today in Duffield is a shining example of the outstanding work that is being done in many of our localities.

Using a \$500,000 federal grant which I secured from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency, and more than \$900,000 from the Telephone Cooperative, SCTC has installed nearly 30 miles of fiber optic cable over the "last mile" from its Internet backbone to the homes and businesses in the old Town of Duffield, Thomas Village and the Duffield Industrial Park.

The Telephone Cooperative has deployed fiber optics to the premises of 236 homes and businesses in the Duffield area. SCTC is currently testing the new network at three business locations in Duffield and will begin connecting interested households and businesses to the fiber optic network later this month by installing new wiring inside the premises. The broadband Internet, television and telephone services are expected to be available to the homes and businesses in old Town Duffield, Thomas Village and the Duffield Industrial Park before the end of the year.

The Scott County Telephone Cooperative will operate and maintain the new telecommunications network, and a variety of Internet, telephone and television packages are now available to residents and businesses within the service area. Interested individuals may contact the company's customer service line at 276-452-8000 to obtain more information about the package offerings or to sign up for any of the new services.

In addition to the new broadband services which are now available to residents and businesses of old Town Duffield, Thomas Village and the Duffield Industrial Park, a portion of the federal grant funds have been used to establish a computer laboratory and public Internet access site at the Pioneer Center in Duffield. Construction on the computer lab is now complete, and the 10 new computer workstations and network printer are now being configured by SCTC and will be installed at the Pioneer Center within the next few weeks. The lab will be staffed by an employee of SCTC who will offer basic computer assistance to users of the access site, and it is expected that the new computer lab will open to the public later this month.

I am pleased to note that our celebration today marks just one of our efforts to deploy high-speed Internet and other broadband services throughout Scott County. Currently, Scott County Telephone Cooperative is using a nearly \$600,000 federal grant, which I helped the Cooperative to obtain, to deploy a similar fiber optic network in the Nickelsville community. Construction is slated to begin this week, and the new telecommunications services are expected to be available to Nickelsville residents and businesses next year. In addition, \$11 million in federal funding which I announced last year is being used to deploy DSL Internet service in Clinchport, Dungannon, Fort Blackmore, the Williams Mill area of Gate City, and the surrounding areas of the County.

The establishment of advanced telecommunications services in Scott County and the creation in some locations of redundant broadband capabilities represents an outstanding success in our efforts to attract highly paid, technology-based jobs to Southwest Virginia. Some technology companies need not one but two fiber backbone paths to the Internet in order to have a backup service if the line they primarily rely on goes out. As I meet with the corporate executives of technology companies and firms interested in expanding their operations into new locations, I can now point to the community of Duffield, particularly the Duffield Industrial Park, as a locality with established telecommunications infrastructures ready to meet all of their business needs.

Just as first canals, then railroads and then highways were the major arteries of commerce in earlier eras, in the 21st Century, access to broadband will be a defining feature of economic success for rural communities. Step by positive step our expanding fiber optic infrastructure is assuring that Southwest Virginia's communities will be at the center of economic opportunity.

I would now like to recognize several individuals who have been instrumental in the success which we celebrate today.

I want to commend Bill Franklin, Executive Vice President and Manager of Scott County Telephone Cooperative and his Board of Directors for the excellent service they are performing for the residents of Scott County. SCTC is helping to lead Scott County into the 21st Century, and I thank them for their commitment to the prosperity and continued development of Southwest Virginia.

I also want to recognize Joel Williams, President of Mid-South Consulting Engineers, and I thank him for lending his expertise to the broadband project in Duffield.

Patrick Carey, General Field Representative for the Rural Utilities Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provided immense support to those involved in obtaining the federal funding for this project.

I also want to thank Skip Skinner, former Assistant Director for LENOWISCO Planning District Commission and the current Wise County Administrator. Skip provided excellent assistance in writing the grant application for this project.

Ron Flanary and his excellent staff at LENISWISCO have provided vision and leadership in expanding the telecommunications infrastructure in the region, and I thank Ron for that critical role.

Finally, I want to recognize my District Director, Laura Lee, for the work she has performed for this project. I place a high priority in my office in obtaining successes much like the one we celebrate today, and Laura Lee's work is vital to our efforts to deploy new broadband technology throughout Southwest Virginia.

The Duffield fiber optic network which we officially light today marks another major step forward in our work to improve the quality of life for Southwest Virginia residents. I want to commend all here for the success of this project and offer a special congratulations to the residents and business owners of old Town Duffield, Thomas Village and the Duffield Industrial Park who will benefit tremendously from the new broadband telecommunications services that are now available to them.